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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the outcomes of 11 California pilot projects designed to return students with disabilities to public education. A total of 220 students with severe disabilities who had been previously placed in private sites were selected to participate based on class communication between the public and private settings. Service delivery models varied from site to site and included merging reintegrated students into existing special education classes, development of new classrooms at a school, and the development of schools within an existing school. Results of the pilots indicated: (1) 43 percent of the students who reintegrated into public schools either graduated or were placed in general education classes, and 12 percent were returned to private school placements by the local education agency (LEA); (2) each pilot site reported cost savings from the approaches they instituted that varied from $90,000 to $466,480; (3) pilot programs reported improved levels of communication, cooperation, and coordination between the LEAs and the private sites and increased levels of interaction between the involved public agencies within the community and the LEAs; and (4) pilot programs reported they felt the structure of the pilots helped improve parent involvement in the educational process. (CR)

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Returning Students with Severe Disabilities to Inclusionary Settings

A Presentation at the 6th Annual International Conference on Mental Retardation and Other Developmental Disabilities
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Abstract

Four out of every 100 special education students in the United States are place in private educational settings. These placements result in expenditures of relatively large amounts of public funds for education in segregated sites. In the mid 1990's the California Legislature funded pilot programs for the purpose of investigating the return of students placed in private schools to public schools. Over 200 students being served in private schools were moved to 11 different school districts or county programs. The findings of this study suggest that a large percentage of students currently placed in private settings may be appropriately educated in public school sites for equal or less expense. From the study, a group of promising practices have been identified and offer a guideline to future attempts to reintegrate students with severe developmental disabilities and emotional disturbance.

Returning Students with Severe Disabilities to Inclusionary Settings

The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires educators to justify any lack of placement of students with disabilities away from the mainstream. Further, the law requires the provision of modifications, supports and related services to help the student with disabilities be successful in general and special education. In this light, over the past years there has been a movement toward the placing students in more inclusive placements. McLeskey, Henry and Hodges (1998) point out that the Cumulative Placement Rate (CPR) of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has increased 60% in the years between 1988-89 and 1994-95 and the CPR for students in both separate Classes and separate schools has deceased in the years from 1990 to 1994-95.

Even with promising statistics like those, four in every 1000 students identified for special education are educated in separate schools (McLeskey, et al., 1998). Although that figure at first review may seem slight, it translates into a significant number of students when placed in the national context, where there are approaching five million students receiving special education services.

When examining the placement of students nationally Hobbs and Westling (1998) have pointed out that students with developmental disabilities are highly represented in placement of private schools and residential facilities. They found in 1996, for example, that the separate school placements of the six to 21 year old population of students with disabilities consisted of eight percent of the students with mental retardation, 21% of the students with traumatic brain injury; approximately 25% of the students with multiple disabilities, 27% of the students with autism, and 57% of the students with deaf-blindness .

Another indicator of the impact of placement of students in separate/non public schools is to view the percentage of cost private school placements in reference to the average dollars spent on a student in the category. Review of the categories above reveals that placement of students with mental retardation in private sites accounts for 21% of the total dollars spent on such placements while placement of multiply handicapped students accounts for 13% of the total expended on private school placements nationally.

Although the 1993-94 figures show that the percentage of students placed in private facilities in California is below a number of other states, (i.e., New Jersey places 5.41% and California on 1.44%), California had

481,746 students place in private facilities. Based on 1998 figures the average cost for private placement was $21,826 per student or $279,344,356 (Parrish et al, 1998).

Viewing such figures, the California legislature became concerned about the diversion of funds away from public education along with the lack of inclusion of students placed in private settings and took action to determine whether such students could be appropriately educated in public school settings. In 1991 the Legislature authorized, 10 pilot projects throughout California to determine if public schools could provide effective mainstreaming of students placed in private settings which in California are referred to as Non-Public Schools or Licensed Care Institutions. In 1993 the Legislature expanded the pilots by two pilot projects and 30 students. In 1997 they funded the continuation of the pilots a massive special education funding reorganization measure. This latter piece of legislation reduced the finical incentives for placing students in private settings and required a study of non public school placement.

The purpose of this article is to provide a descriptive summary of the outcomes of the pilot programs designed to return students into public education. A second goal is to present an aggregate of salient practices from the pilot programs. The hope is that these may be used as a guide for

the implementation of programs which either prevent the placement of students with developmental disabilities in private settings or which facilitate the return of previously placed students with developmental disabilities to more inclusive setting.

The Pilot Programs

A summary of the pilot programs was published in as a report to the California Legislature in 1987 (California Department of Education). This report made it clear that each one of the pilot programs was unique when compared to the other pilots. This uniqueness can be accounted for based on the needs of the district, leadership, and implementation of resources. Some of the programs merged students with severe disabilities into existing special education classes while others actually created the classrooms within existing sites. No attempt has been made to compare the individual pilot sites. However, for the purpose of report data on students has been aggregated.

Students

Students with disabilities who had been previously placed in private sites were selected to participated based on close communication between the public and private settings. Students who appeared to have a likelihood of success if reintegrated were targeted.

Two hundred twenty students were enrolled in the program in the 1994-95 school year. The figures for students with developmental disabilities were as follows:

Insert Table 1 about here

The ages of the students involved in the pilot programs are reported in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

Of the students initially reintegrated 162 were male and 58 were female.

Sites

Although the legislature originally agreed to fund ten sites, one district with drew and two were added through subsequent legislation. Those 11 sites were provided funds based upon the number of students and the average cost per selected site for non-public school placement. Table 3 summarizes the number of students served and the per student money allotted to each of the pilot programs.

Insert Table 3 about here

Five of the sites served the entire spectrum of ages. Four programs focused on secondary age students, one program provided services to the

only middle school students, and one served elementary and middle school aged students. Service delivery models in each site varied from site to site. Models included merging reintegrated students into existing special education classes; development of new classrooms at a school and the development of schools within an existing school.

Findings

Student Outcomes

Over the three year life of the pilot projects the following student out comes were noted. Forty-three percent of the students reintegrated into public schools either graduated or were placed in general education classes. Over 27% moved out of the pilot district's attendance area. While 17.5 percent were placed by either their parent(s) or the courts in other than public schools. Twelve percent of students in the study were returned to private school placements by the LEAs.

Fiscal Outcomes

A line by line comparison of cost between the public and non-public schools was not undertaken because of different accounting systems. Further, several public sites did not report provide specific figures concerning their pilot program. With this noted, each pilot site reported cost savings from the approaches they instituted. The cost saving for

1995-96 of public school placement over private placement ranged $90,000 and $466,480 per pilot program.

General Outcomes

The pilot programs reported improved the levels of communication, cooperation and coordination between the LEAs and the private sites. Also reported was increased levels of interaction between the involved public agencies within the community and the LEAs. Finally, the pilot programs reported that they felt the structure of the pilots helped improve parent involvement in the educational process. No attempt was made to quantify these out comes.

Implications to Practice

An analysis of this research provides much room for criticism concerning design and especially in reference to data collection. Although the research and outcomes are a group of loosely tied together sets of data and at times opinion, which lack the scientific rigor required for replication, they do provide valuable implications to practice. This is because the aggregated data of the are 11 pilot projects indicates that they were able to successfully reintegrate a large percentage of students with severe developmental disabilities into public schools. These were students who LEA's, in the past, had been unable to serve and were willing to pay

for private service providers to serve. Further, the pilots were able to educate a large number students for the same or smaller dollar amounts than it was costing to serve these students in more segregated settings.

Although each of the nine pilot sites were unique, commonalties in the general program, staffing and support, interaction with the family and the transition process did exist. It is these commonalties that provide direction for future attempts to reintegrate students with severe disabilities into public school settings.

Program Commonalties

Each of the pilot programs had a number of commonalties which were evident. It would seem that not every component is necessary for a successful program but most are. Administrators contemplating reintegration of students into public school settings should look long and hard at any of the categories that their proposed programs can not provide prior to attempting reintegration of students with severe developmental disabilities. The communities include:

1. Strong program leadership
2. Strong support from the county or district office administration
3. Strong support staff including instructional aides
4. High staff to student ratio

5. Highly individualized attention to meet each student's needs

6. Emphasis on behavioral and/or social skills

7. Provision of family support and counseling

8. Proactive/Preventive orientation (Special Education Non Public School Mainstreaming Pilot Program 1997)

Staffing and Support

Staffing/support changes was one of the most evident areas in which the pilot programs varied from existing special day, self-contained classrooms or other service settings. Every program added professional staff and increased aide time. Most of the programs used specialized personnel within the classrooms and to meet family needs in the areas of mental health or counseling; home/school intervention; and program liaison. Finally, all pilot programs had an advisory committee which was mandated by the State legislation.

Professional Staff. It should be understood, the staffing changes that occurred varied because of the needs of the students selected to be reintegrated and the service model philosophy guiding each pilot were diverse. The overriding concept that was evident, relating to professional staff was that all the programs expanded their staff on either a full time or part time basis or both. Additional full time staff included a counselor, a

transition specialist, and a behavior specialist. Part time additions came from a variety of sources which included, existing school resources and volunteers. The positions added on a part time basis included psychologist, intern counselors, and an art/drama specialist.

Instructional Aides. The para-professional staff in each of the pilots, was increased. Most programs added at least one aide to each classroom. Both inclusion programs and special day classrooms used 1-1 aides to a varying degree for the more difficult students within the pilot sample along with 1 to 1 aides for many students during the initial placement phase.

The other component that most of pilots used was increased formal and informal training of aides. This training was beyond what was traditionally offered to para-professionals in the schools where the pilot's were located.

Other specialized staff. The pilots used three other types of staff to insure success for the greatest number of students. The first was a concerted effort to bring the Department of Mental Health professionals into the classrooms. The was for the provision of both individual and group counseling as well as family focused change. This level of interagency cooperation, although encouraged by the California Legislature over the

past years, was not a reality in the providing services in may of the sites prior to the pilot projects.

Pilot programs also hired individuals to be home/school interventionists. The home/school component was identified as critical by the vast majority of the programs. The home/school interventionist varied from site to site. One effective model that emerged was the hiring of a parent who had a child in the program. The home/school interventionists were given additional training and support often from a professional councilor or a behavioral specialist.

Program liaison positions were also used by a number of the programs. This position handled many of the quasi-administrative tasks including insuring that case management, progress monitoring and staff meetings occurred. Program liaisons also performed the function of coordination with agencies and the host school site.

Advisory Committee. Because the legislation authorizing the pilots required advisory committees each of the pilots used advisory committees. The committees represented an array of professionals and representatives from involved agencies. The programs generally found the advisories improved communication and expedited the removal of obstacles. It was

also noted that advisory committees improved the credibility of the pilot programs within the general community.

Interaction with Families

Another area of commonality found in each of the pilots was the extra ordinary effort that was made to engage the families of the students involved in the reintegration efforts. The employment of a staff person as a family or home school liaison/consultant is an example of this. One of the pilots set aside a special room on campus for parents to come and visit with staff during school hours. Some of the programs held weekly parent meetings. The importance of this aspect of the pilot programs is reflected in the fact that for many of the students who returned to non-public schools family involvement and family support for the reintegration efforts had not been successfully obtained.

The Transition Process

The transition of students back into public school settings was the other area of shared emphasis of each of the programs attempting to reintegrate targeted students. In most cases transition was planned with a great deal of detail. Factors such as time and date, method of transportation, accompanying adults, class schedule, medication and treatment, and academic and behavioral expectation were all clearly

addressed prior to the student leaving the private setting. Included in the process was a joint IEP involving staff from both sites and visitations by the staff and in some cases by the student to the new school. Several of the programs arranged direct aide support and in some cased one on one aides prior to implementation of placement of the student. Once again the majority of obstacles and questions were addressed prior to the transition of the student to the new site.

Summary and Discussion

The research indicated that the 11 pilot programs were extremely successful, when it is taken into consideration that they were dealing with students with disabilities that school districts had already decided could not be served in public settings. The total project demonstrated that many students being served in private settings can be successfully served in public schools. Further, this was done at equal or less expense than it is costing to education students with severe developmental disabilities and emotional disturbance in more segregated settings.

The ability to generalize the practices used by any one of the pilot programs should be questioned because of the lack of scientific rigor in the design of the study and ambiguous reporting. One the other hand, the ability to generalize the aggrate of the data to practice seem to reasonable,

considering several factors. First, the number of severely involved students involved in the total pilot was relatively high. Second the nine pilot sites were quite diverse in approach, student make-up and administrative support and orientation. Third, because California ranks 13th among states in percentage of students in private placements and in the bottom one fifth in average dollars spent on education of students (Parrish, et al., 1998), the potential for the findings to reflect the realities of many school systems is high. If the sample was taken from a state like Massachusetts, for example that ranks high in both private school placement percentage of students with disabilities and dollars average dollars spent per student on education the application of the findings might be less transferrable.

A variety of approaches and models seem to work for the reinclusion of students with severe disabilities. One of the most critical models seems to be the use of treatment teams which provide services both inside and outside of the classroom. This was accomplished by increasing the number of and the expertise of those providing both direct and indirect services to the students. Another related finding is that making reinclusion successful and prevention of placement or return to private settings is quite labor intensive. This raise questions concerning the long term

continuation of such efforts in times of limited availability of qualified professional.

The study demonstrated that public schools can educate a large percentage of the students being served in private settings for equal or less money than is currently being expended. The question must be, how much these saving actually will be over time? This should be considered in the light that one of the other finding of the was that the private settings are a necessary component of the continuum of services. Much like the attempted elimination of state hospitals during the past decades, private schools are a need resource to public schools for some students with developmental disabilities. The impact of moving students out of such settings provides the potential of the closure of private service providers and actually drive up the individual student cost. This could make services to smaller number of students placed in private settings more expensive than it currently is.

Finally, the California study (California Department of Education Special Education Division, 1997) has defined a set of effective guidelines for the reintegration of students with severe disabilities. It is essential for districts which are attempting to reintegrate similar students to document not only expenditures but outcomes of such programs to insure that

students are and will continue to receive an appropriate education in the least restrict settings.

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Table 1

Students Returned to Public Schools by Disability Category

Primary Disability Category *	Number	Percentage of total
MR	27	12.3
HH	1	.5
DEA	1	.5
VH	2	.9
SED	105	48
OI	1	.5
OHI	2	.9
SLD	67	31
MH	9	4
OTH	5	3

Source: California Depart of Education (1997). Special Education Non Public School Mainstreaming Pilot Program.

Table 2

Students grouped by age

Age Group	Number
0-5 years	4
6-13	46
14-18	138
19-22	33

Source: California Depart of Education (1997). Special Education Non Public School Mainstreaming Pilot Program.

Table 3

1995-96 Pilot sites, Students and Allotted Amount Per Student

Site	Number of Students	Amount Per Student
Contra Costa COE	10	$23,418
W. Contra Costa USD	20	22,422
Whittier Union HSD	18	15,365
Marin COE	30	24,472
Moreno Valley USD	28	18,622
San Diego USD	18	12,999
San Francisco	16	15,568
San Mateo COE	10	17,690
Santa Barbara COE	30	27,440
Fremont Union HSD	20	19,544
Shasta COE	20	21,443

Source: California Depart of Education (1997). Special Education Non Public School Mainstreaming Pilot Program